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A REVIVED PLEA FOR FREE ART

I only want to say one word in regard to this proposition of taxing art. An impost is either a tax, pure and simple, for the purpose of raising revenue only, or it is a duty imposed to protect home industries. In the nature of the case this duty must belong to the former class. It is not a protective duty, for no one, of course, pretends for a moment that you can create artistic genius by a protective tariff. The artists of America, who are the producers in this case, desire free art, and they desire it in the interest of art alone. The demand is almost absolutely universal from all the artists in that regard.

If we lay the duty, therefore, we lay it simply as a tax for the purpose of raising revenue. We do not need the money. If we did, we should not now be engaged in passing a bill of which the first object is the reduction of revenue. If we maintain this tax, therefore, the only ground is that it is a tax which it is especially desirable to retain. As a matter of fact, the argument in its favor proceeds on this theory, and we are asked to retain the tax on art because it is said that art is a luxury.

There can be no doubt of the soundness of the general principle. Luxuries ought to be taxed to the highest point compatible with safe collection. Let us tax diamonds and all precious stones, jewelry and china, horses and carriages, French dresses and English coats, everything that ministers to the luxurious tastes and fancies and to luxurious living. They cannot, in my opinion, be too highly taxed. If pictures and statues belong in this class, let us place on them the heaviest duty that they can bear. But do they belong in this class? If they do, why should we admit them free for museums, for schools of art, and other public institutions? Museums and schools of art are not the homes of luxury, but of education, and works of art are means of education.

All civilized nations recognize this character in them, and we do so ourselves when we let them in without a duty for public institutions. To tax them, therefore, when they come in by private importation is to tax a potent factor of education, refinement, and civilization. When they are in the country, let those who import them for their own pleasure alone be taxed by the State and municipal governments, and taxed so long as they keep them in their own possession; but do not let us discourage and prevent the importation of works of art. I say, let us encourage the importation of works of art in the interests of the people, for it is really and in the end in their interest, and in theirs alone.

All the greatest works of art in the world to-day belong to the people and are gathered in the galleries and museums, which are open to mankind, and which give pleasure and instruction to all alike,—to gentle and simple, to rich and poor. It is the same here. The rich man buys them, but in the end the people own them; and the owner-

ship of the people is perpetual. All the great works of art which come to this country pass either by gift or bequest and in no very long time, into the public galleries, libraries, and museums, and become the people's property, never to be taken away.

Nothing is imported more surely for the people at large and for their education and pleasure than great works of art, and for their sake, I say, let us encourage the importation of all that is best in painting and sculpture, and not, by degrading them to the rank of a luxury, put a tax upon education and popular pleasure and instruction. Let us leave them free, too, for the sake of our artists and for the benefit and development of American art.

Our own artists are now forced to go to Europe, where schools of art are thrown open to them, owing largely to the fact that we put a burden of this character upon art here and keep pictures and sculpture out of the country, drying up the springs from which the museums and galleries are fed. As I have said, all the pictures and statues of great value that are imported into this country sooner or later find their way into the museums and become the property of the people for future generations. They then become the means of education and refinement, not to the artists merely, but to the whole community and treasures of untold value are then open to the daily enjoyment of the people without money and without price.

Again let me repeat for the schools of design and for all the purposes of art education this freeing of art is of inestimable value. In one word, I think, it is the part of the most highly civilized nation in the world, and in the interest of the whole people who can get the pleasure and instruction of the fine arts in no other way, that we should encourage and not discourage art and art education.

HENRY CABOT LODGE.



* Some years ago the Italian Government decreed that a census should be taken of all works of art in private hands, so that objects of national value should be located and their whereabouts watched. This was to prevent, so far as possible, the sale of ancient and modern works without due notice to the Inspectors of Fine Arts, for the government exacts the privilege of making an offer to the owner before such things leave Italy. No work of art can leave the country without a permit duly signed by the proper official. Now it is proposed to embody the reports of the art census in a catalogue, to be edited by Corrado Ricci, the new Director General of Fine Arts. A monthly bulletin is to be started, devoted to the discovery of little-known works of art, and each department of the country is to have a special inspector, who shall report the kind, size, and condition of the art works, their history and quality, in order that the catalogue shall be comprehensive. This is a labor, indeed; it will take many years to catalogue everything, notwithstanding the fact that Italy has been exporting old art for centuries.